



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

FEBRUARY 1st, 1864.

MENDELSSOHN'S LETTERS.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

Author of "Musings of a Musician."

WE open the second volume of Mendelssohn's correspondence, with the same feeling of earnest sympathy which prompts us to watch over the future of a friend, whose youth has won our love. The career of so great an artist and so good a man points a double moral to those who follow him; for we may see not only how a pure art can ennoble a mind, but how a pure mind can ennoble an art, and that no sordid homage to the world's patronage is necessary for true genius to establish its name. Mendelssohn seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of his own power; and throughout the whole of his letters, we trace the constant fear that he may be tempted beyond what he conceived to be its natural limit. This self-examination was indeed one of the ruling points of his character, leading him on every occasion to make as deep a study of his own works as he did of those of others; and to this fact the perfect manner in which his compositions eventually appeared may no doubt be attributed. That this peculiarity may have arisen partly from his desire to perpetuate only his ripest thoughts, and partly from a restlessness of disposition which irresistibly impelled him to constant alteration, we are led to imagine from his own words in many of his letters. We know, for instance, that many compositions, far advanced, were eventually laid aside; and speaking of the "Walpurgis Night" (which seemed always to haunt him in different shapes), he says, "I have been obliged to re-write the whole score, from A to Z, and to add two new arias, not to mention the rest of the clipping and cutting. If I don't like it now, I solemnly vow to give it up for the rest of my life."

The letters in the second volume, extending from 1833 to 1847 (the year of his death), embrace the whole of the period when he was universally looked upon as the presiding genius of the art, and when professors, amateurs, and students alike longed for his countenance and society. Few indeed became his pupils; but so open was he in his love for every one who regarded, or seemed to regard, music in the sacred light which it occupied in his own mind, that all who came to him received and profited by his kindly advice and assistance. With many—indeed too many—the world-wide fame gained by the production of *St. Paul* would have brought with it that undue sense of self-importance which makes the empty flattery of the ignorant more acceptable than the solid

appreciation of the educated; but Mendelssohn merely looked upon his success as a proof that his devotional offerings to art had been accepted, and received the applause which accompanied it with the modesty of a true devotee. In a letter to his father, speaking of the Cologne Festival, he says, "You must be well aware that your presence at the festival would not only be no *gêne* to me, but on the contrary, would cause me first to feel true joy and delight in my success. Allow me to take this opportunity to say to you that the approbation and enjoyment of the public, to which I am certainly very sensible, only causes me real satisfaction when I can write to tell you of it, because I know it rejoices you, and one word of praise from you is more truly precious to me, and makes me happier than all the public in the world applauding me in concert; and thus to see you among the audience would be the dearest of all rewards to me for my labours." In writing to his mother, describing the festival at Birmingham, he remarks, "The applause and shouts at the least glimpse of me were incessant, and sometimes really made me laugh; for instance, they prevented my being able for long to sit down to the instrument to play a pianoforte concerto; and what is better than all this applause, and a sure proof of my success, were the offers made to me on all sides, and of a very different tenor this time from what they ever were before." Something more earnest follows in the same letter, and may help to show that these outward demonstrations of public approval were accepted by him at their true value. "I may well say that I now see, beyond doubt, that all this is only bestowed on me because, in the course of my work, I do not in the least concern myself as to what people wish, and praise and pay for, but solely as to what I consider good; so I shall now less than ever allow myself to be turned aside from the right path. I therefore peculiarly rejoice in my success, and I feel more confident than ever that not the smallest effort shall be made by me to ensure success, nor indeed ever has been made." One other extract, in a letter to his brother, will prove how little this constant whirl of feverish artistic excitement fitted in with his naturally calm and contemplative nature. In reply to an observation of his brother that his "quiet, settled, and untroubled position, sometimes made him feel uneasy," he says, "It is singular that in my position, I might complain of the very reverse of what troubles you; the more I find what are termed encouragement and recognition in my vocation, the more restless and unsettled does it become in my hands; and I cannot deny that I often long for that rest of which you complain. So few traces remain of performances and musical festivals, and all that is personal; the people indeed shout and applaud, but that quickly passes away, without leaving a vestige behind; and yet it absorbs as much of

one's life and strength as *better* things, or perhaps even more; and the evil of this is that it is impracticable to come half out, when you are once in; you must either go on the whole way, or not at all. I dare not even attempt to withdraw, or the cause which I have undertaken will suffer; and yet I would gladly see that it was not merely *my* cause, but considered a good and universal one. But this is the very point where people are wanting to pursue the same path—not an approving public (for that is a matter of indifference), but fellow-workers (and they are indispensable). So in *this* sense I long for a less busy life, in order to devote myself to my peculiar province—composition of music, and to leave the execution of it to others. It seems, however, that this is not to be, and I should be ungrateful were I dissatisfied with my life as it is."

It may be reasonably imagined that the absorbing nature of Mendelssohn's occupations at this period must have prevented the possibility of his bestowing attention upon the artistic struggles of others less gifted than himself. Many of his letters, however, show that wherever the weight of his name could aid the cause of an artist, however obscure, his heart and hand were always ready. Those obligations which he would never have placed himself under on his own account, he has continually incurred for the sake of others—not only by recommending the works of young composers to the notice of his own publishers, but by making a direct appeal to the King of Prussia for the means of enabling a student, of whom he thought highly, to pursue his musical studies at Berlin, a request which we may here say was immediately granted. As a mere *teacher* he was constantly doubtful of his own qualifications; feeling—as only genius can feel—how much the natural gifts may be cramped and confined within the narrow limits of scholastic rules; and we see on all occasions that what is conventionally called "giving lessons" was almost opposed to his own conception of the mission of a real artist. That an education which should lead to the most acute perception of all that was noble and beautiful, and an earnest study of the world's treasures, in nature and art, was not only advisable, but necessary, he never doubted; but this was the one long "lesson" of a life, and not to be taught by professors. Hence we see that he constantly recoiled from the notion of his occupying the respectable post of musical preceptor at the Conservatorium; and in a letter to Professor Naumann, although he speaks in most friendly terms of his son, whom he wished to place with him as a pupil, and tenders him the soundest advice as to his musical education, he tells him frankly that unless he believes that he is the *only* person who can render service to him—in which case he should consider it his *duty* to receive him—he would prefer that he should study with the ablest professors in his

native place. Indeed, the very name of *master* was completely repugnant to his feelings. As a friend, he would give you the result of his own experience; but the attempt to place him upon a pinnacle above you, seemed to jar with the innate modesty of his nature, and he invariably protested against it. In a letter to his mother, from Leipzig, he says, "I have to-day formed a resolution in which I heartily rejoice, and that is, never again to take any part as judge of the prizes at a musical competition. Several proposals of this kind were made to me, and I did not know why I should be so annoyed by these, till I clearly saw that it was in fact a display of arrogance on my part, to which I would not myself submit from others, and should therefore carefully avoid; thus setting myself up as a proficient, and my taste as incontrovertible; and in an idle hour passing in review all the assembled competitors, and criticising them, and, God knows, possibly being guilty of the most glaring injustice towards them. So I resolved, once for all, to renounce the office, and feel quite relieved by having done so." Many instances of good counsel, however,—written in the loving spirit of a brother artist—occur in the course of his correspondence; and we should be glad, if by the few extracts we make, attention may be drawn to the letters themselves. In a communication to Carl Eckert, in Paris, respecting his compositions, he writes, "You have reached a standard that may in every relation well be called a mastership, which all musicians or friends to music must highly esteem, and beyond which nothing actually extrinsic (whether it be called erudition or recognition, facility and knowledge, or honour and fame) is any longer worth striving for; but this is, in my opinion, just the time when true work really first begins. The question is, then, solely what is felt and experienced within a man's own breast, and uttered from the depths of his heart, be it grave or gay, bitter or sweet—character and life are displayed here; and in order to prevent existence being dissipated and wasted when brilliant and happy—or depressed and destroyed when the reverse—there is but one safeguard—to work, and to go on working. So, for your sake, I have only one wish, that you may bring to light what exists within you, in your nature and feelings, which none save yourself can know or possess. In your works, go deeper into your inmost being, and let them bear a distinct stamp; let criticism and intellect rule as much as you please in all outward questions and forms; but in all inner and original thought, the heart alone, and genuine feeling. So work daily, hourly, and unremittingly—*there* you never can attain entire mastery or perfection; no man ever yet did, and therefore it is the highest vocation of life." To his young nephew, Sebastian, he also gives some golden rules for his guidance, on hearing that he intended to become a painter. "If," he

says, "you intend to adopt painting as a profession, you cannot too soon accustom yourself to study the *meaning* of a work of art with more earnestness and zeal than its mere *form*,—that is, in other words (as a painter is so fortunate as to be able to select visible nature herself for his substance), to contemplate and to study nature most lovingly, most closely, most innately and inwardly, all your life long. Study very thoroughly how the outer form and the inward formation of a tree, or a mountain, or a house always *must* look, and how it *can* be made to look, if it is to be beautiful, and then produce it with sepia or oils, or on a smoked plate; it will always be of use, if only as a testimony of your love of substance." It is difficult to find such lessons as these, whatever remuneration may be offered in return.

That the small works of a great man are immeasurably superior to the great works of a small man, may be proved beyond doubt by the many exquisite little pieces which Mendelssohn has left us, under the title of "*Lieder ohne worte*." These results of what may be called his hours of idleness, are as perfect of their kind as the most elaborate compositions; and so thoroughly diversified are they in character, that the fingers of a well-trained pianist, and the mind of an accomplished musician, are absolutely necessary to give them due effect. The *indefinite* nature of music as a language was never admitted by Mendelssohn. To him words were more ambiguous than notes; and his "*lieder ohne worte*," however they may be felt by others, were to him even more intelligible than if he had conveyed his meaning in words. What he says on this subject is, however, too interesting to be passed over, considering how extensively these compositions are spread abroad. In a letter to Marc-André Souchay, who had asked him the meaning of some of his "songs without words," he writes, "If you ask me what *my* idea is, I say—just the song as it stands; and if I have in my mind a definite term or terms with regard to one or more of these songs, I will disclose them to no one, because the words of one person assume a totally different meaning in the mind of another person, because the music of the song alone can awaken the same ideas and the same feelings in one mind as in another,—a feeling which is not, however, expressed by the same words. Resignation, melancholy, the praise of God, a hunting-song,—one person does not form the same conception from these that another does. Resignation is to the one, what melancholy is to the other; the third can form no lively idea of either. To any man who is by nature a very keen sportsman, a hunting-song, and the praise of God, would come pretty much to the same thing; and to such a one the sound of the hunting-horn would really and truly be the praise of God, while we hear nothing in it but a mere hunting-song; and if we were to discuss it ever so often with him, we

should get no further. Words have many meanings, and yet music we could both understand correctly." A quotation from the fourth part of Goethe's "*Dichtung und Wahrheit*," given as a foot-note in this letter, adds strength to these remarks of Mendelssohn. "I have already but too plainly seen that no one person understands another; that no one receives the same impression as another from the very same words."

It is painful to read of the bereavements which, in the midst of his brilliant career, came upon Mendelssohn so rapidly, that his constitution had barely time to rally between each. The death of his father, mother, and lastly of his favorite sister, threw a gloom over his mind which even the active nature of his daily pursuits could not dissipate. After the loss of his sister, his words of grief show how hard was the task of nerving himself to exertion. "My family are all well," he writes; "the happy unconcerned faces of my children alone have done me good in these days of sorrow. I have not as yet been able to think of music; when I try to do so, all seems empty and desolate within me. But when the children come in, I feel less sad, and I can look at them and listen to them for hours." This letter was written on the 24th May, 1847; and on the 4th November, of the same year, he had ceased to exist.

These fragments of a life, in which so much is necessarily omitted, will, we hope, not be accepted in place of a biography, which should rank as one of the most interesting ever given to the world. There are no doubt reasons why those in charge of his many unpublished works should be cautious in submitting them to public criticism; yet we earnestly hope that, for the sake of art, these reasons may not be considered of sufficient weight to justify them in placing a permanent seal upon compositions which may yet add a lustre to the name of Mendelssohn. No verdict of private individuals, delivered with closed doors, however competent they may imagine themselves to pass judgment, will satisfy the many who justly feel that they have a right to be admitted to the trial. We have the utmost respect for the sacred duties entrusted to his surviving relatives; yet we would urge upon them to reflect whether, in their too zealous desire to carry out those duties conscientiously, they are not withholding a treasure which its possessor, had he lived, might have voluntarily bequeathed to the art which he had already done so much to enrich.

ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA.

THE management of this establishment, having at length discovered that no amount of exaggerated advertisement can effectually support a feeble work, determined on Monday, the 4th ult., to call in the aid of a name hitherto unknown to fame, and achieved the first genuine success of the season. The new operetta, *Fanchette*, is the composition of Mr. W. C. Levey, son of the musical director of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, and the *libretto* is by Mr. Maddison Morton. The scene is laid, during